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EXPANDED EDITION

when God writes your love story

the ultimate guide to guy/girl relationships



ERIC & LESLIE LUDY

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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Author's Note

✖ ERIC ✖

I find it kind of strange being an author. It's bewildering that people actually read our books. Don't get me wrong; that *is* why we write them. But it's a strange sensation to realize that somehow the way we personally articulate ideas meshes with the way someone else understands ideas. It's a wonder of wonders that never ceases to amaze us.

This particular book is the one that has surprised me the most because it has received a greater response than all of our other books combined. Ten years ago, *When God Writes Your Love Story* introduced a generation to the extraordinary beauty of a God-scripted romance.

Over the past decade, informal surveys of our readers have shown that an average of five people read each purchased copy of *When God Writes Your Love Story*. It's one of those life-changing books that people like to pass around to their friends. I can't tell you how many faded, battered, torn-up copies of this book I've signed over the years. I love signing the really bedraggled copies, those "I've read it seventeen times" copies.

This book has somehow, through all its quirky stories and romantic nit-witticisms, effectively wormed its way into the hearts of countless readers and is still one of the greatest-selling Christian relationship books of all time. I may not be able to fully comprehend the reasons for that, but something packaged inside this book has deeply moved

hundreds of thousands of people to completely alter their approach to building romantic relationships.

And I think that response comes, at least in part, because the message is so simple. Well, it also might have to do with the fact that this book hews tightly to the triumvirate of qualities that characterize every classic Ludy book: it's desperately romantic, awkwardly hilarious, and of course, spiritually heartwarming.

To be quite honest, both Leslie and I felt a longing to completely rewrite this book from scratch. We were convinced we could express the message so much better and more profoundly now that we have ten years of added wisdom under our belts. However, when we presented that idea to a few of the more vocal members of the *When God Writes* fan club, they were all quite disturbed by the concept.

One individual proclaimed, “Don’t mess with this book! It’s Eric and Leslie captured in a bottle, with all their youthful zeal, naiveté, corniness, and passion fully intact.”

While Leslie and I were inclined to make this book sound a bit more grown-up, it would seem that the eccentric youthful nature of this book is part of its magic. It’s a hilarious book about some of the most dead-serious issues on planet Earth. And somehow, it works. So instead of changing the whole book, we did as our publisher asked and just “freshened” it up a bit. This revised edition is an update of the classic message that has impacted so many lives.

For those of you familiar with the original version, you will find all sorts of new chunks of gold hidden within; we’ve added new stories, deeper truths, and a greater wealth of application. And while many of the embarrassingly outmoded phrases and illustrations have

been altered to reflect our modern times, we left in a few Eric-isms just so that you can enjoy a good laugh at my expense.

If you are new to this book, welcome. Leslie and I hope and pray that you will find something in this revised edition that connects with your heart just as it has connected with the hundreds of thousands of readers before you.

Ten years may have passed, but the two of us haven't changed a bit when it comes to the message of this book. We are still crazy in love with each other and still ever-smiling proponents of God-built romance. (It's amazing, but this stuff only gets better with time.)

P.S. To take the message of this book even deeper in your life and to find out more about our ministry, Leslie and I invite you to visit our Web site, www.setapartlife.com. Hope to see you there!

Introduction

The Awakening

× LESLIE ×

I'll never forget the night Brandon broke up with me. Though it happened more than sixteen years ago, the intensity of that experience remains seared upon my memory even now. It was my sophomore year in high school. I was happy and thriving—with plenty of friends and a good-looking, popular boyfriend who seemed to worship the ground I walked on. Life was fun and fulfilling. And then, within the space of a five-minute phone conversation, my world came crashing down around me.

"I think we should break up," Brandon told me, with a matter-of-factness that dug into me like a knife.

My trembling fingers tightened around the phone cord, and I choked back the sob that threatened to explode from my tightening lungs. This didn't make sense. Hadn't he said he would always love me? Hadn't he told me, time and time again, that he could never live without me? Didn't he appreciate the fact that I had built my entire world around him for the past eight months? Didn't he remember the countless hours we had spent together, declaring our devotion and love for each other and selecting names for our future children?

The nightmare had come true again. A relationship that had become my entire identity, security, and source of fulfillment was being ruthlessly ripped away, leaving me heartbroken and devastated.

A cutting pain squeezed my heart, so intense I could scarcely breathe. Somehow I managed to end the phone call with at least a small amount of dignity. As I placed the receiver into its cradle, a dark cloud of despair overcame me, mercilessly pouring a torrent of rejection and hopelessness into my reeling mind.

It was over.

Once again, I was in for a sleepless night of agony, hours of weeping until no more tears would come. Once again, I would have to face the aching, desperate loneliness of walking into a crowded room full of strangers—with no hand to hold, no strong arm to gently rest on my back and give me security. Once again, I was alone.

During the past few years, I had made incredible sacrifices in an attempt to somehow cling to every short-lived dating relationship that came my way. I had given pieces of myself away to each guy that came into my life—pieces of my heart, my emotions, and even my body. Yet each time, once he got bored with me, my fragile heart would be carelessly tossed aside. I longed to be loved and cherished. I had dreamed of a perfect love story ever since I was a five-year-old girl watching *Cinderella*. But somewhere in the midst of the endless cycle of one temporary romance after the next, my dreams had shattered right along with the broken and fragmented pieces of my heart. Yes, I was still young. But even so, I'd already begun to give up on the idea of ever finding real love.

Growing up in church, I had listened carefully to the instructions

given by my youth group leaders and tried to follow the Christian rules of dating to the letter. But those rules failed to protect me from a broken heart and shattered life. And as I observed my Christian friends, I saw we were all following the same pattern: an endless cycle of shallow and cheap romances that never lasted and left us emotionally bleeding and insecure.

My desperation finally motivated me to start praying. I'd been a Christian from the time I was five, but in the past few years God had taken a backseat in my life. I would have said that He was my highest priority, but in reality, I was far more preoccupied with guys, friends, and my social status. I didn't really see anything wrong with the way I'd chosen to live. My lifestyle was far more moral than that of most of my peers. Even though God wasn't the centerpiece of my daily life, I assumed that I was still on good terms with Him.

But the fact that I kept getting my heart broken again and again finally made me wonder if I was doing something wrong. A few days after the Brandon breakup, still wallowing in depression and confusion, I cried out to God.

"What am I doing wrong?" I asked earnestly. "I've followed the Christian dating rules. I'm not having sex before marriage, and I'm dating Christian guys. Why am I so miserable and insecure? Why does every relationship end this way?"

Then came a soft tugging upon my heart. Suddenly I somehow knew that my life did not need to be this way and that God had something better for me. I felt Him gently whisper these words to my soul: *You continue to get your heart broken because you are holding the pen of your life and trying to write your own story. I am the Author of true love.*

I am the Creator of romance. I know your heart's every desire. I want to script a beautiful tale just for you, but first you must give the pen to Me. You must let Me become the center of your existence. You must let Me have total control of your love life, and every other area of your life as well.

The thought of giving God complete control of my life, especially my love life, was a bit daunting. I didn't really mind obeying certain Christian guidelines for dating, as long as I could still hold the pen and write the story myself. But...letting go of my right to make all my own decisions about relationships? I just wasn't sure I was ready to give God *that* much control. God was asking me to trust Him—fully, completely, and wholeheartedly. He was asking me to allow Him to write my love story. But what if He let me down? Even though my Sunday school upbringing had taught me that God loved me, inwardly I always suspected that maybe He was more interested in making me miserable than in blessing me. What if I gave Him the pen and He completely destroyed this area of my life? What if He never allowed me to find a love story at all? Or what if He directed me to someone I wasn't even attracted to?

I wrestled intensely with the decision. And in spite of all my fears and misgivings about turning the pen of my life over to God, one realization was extremely clear. As long as I continued writing my own story, I knew I would only find more heartache and disappointment. I had made a mess of this area of my life thus far. It was clear I needed some serious help.

So, more out of desperation than confidence, I invited the Creator of the universe to be the center of my love life. Did He disappoint me? Just the opposite. I was soon to discover that the Author of love and

romance, who loved me more than I could comprehend, had a plan for my love life that would take my breath away with its beauty.

I don't know if I could ever fully convey the wonder of what it was like to have a God-written love story. During my entire pre-marriage relationship with Eric, I was so aware of the fact that it was *God* who was leading each step, guiding each conversation, painting each sunset, and standing over us with a smile. The cheap, imitation romance I'd known before simply could not be compared to this new kind of love. Daily I was amazed that I had come from a place of heartbreak, confusion, and compromise in relationships to a dream come true. I discovered a kind of divine love that can't even be found in the fairy tales, simply by giving God the pen of my life's story and allowing Him to write each chapter.

In this day and age of do-it-yourself Christianity, many scoff at the idea of God scripting a love story. Countless Christian voices caution that we shouldn't allow our expectations of Him to become too high or we'll only be disappointed.

In fact, it's often deemed more spiritual to take matters into our own hands, make all our own decisions, and then ask God to bless our choices. And that's the way most modern Christians have chosen to approach this area of life. Ever since Eric and I began speaking about God-written love stories, we've heard the response, "Well, maybe you two experienced that, but I don't know very many other people who have! I don't think it's something that everyone should expect."

It's true that God-scripted love stories are not common in today's

*As for God, His way
is perfect.*

PSALM 18:30

world. But the reason is that so few of us are truly willing to *allow* God to have His way in our lives. As long as *we* are in control, we don't give Him the opportunity to prove just how interested He is in this precious area of our lives. Eric and I strongly believe that if you are brave enough to turn the pen of your life over to the Author of romance, you'll soon discover that God *is* in the business of scripting fairy-tale love stories. (And yes, this is true even if He's called you to a life of singleness, as we'll discuss later on.) God's version of building a relationship is infinitely superior to the pattern this world offers. God doesn't need to imitate the world's method for writing a love story; He has His own version. And once you find yourself in the pages of His captivating script, you'll never want to go back to the mediocre romances of our modern times!

This book contains a message that can forever alter your life. I invite you to join Eric and me as we share with you the incredible process of discovering a God-written love story. No matter what you've been through in relationships, no matter how cynical you might be, this message is for you. God is intensely interested in this area of your life. If you choose to trust Him with absolute abandon, you will discover something beyond all you've ever dreamed of.

This book is not about rules or relationship how-tos. It's not a comprehensive guide to experiencing the singles scene or making yourself more appealing to the opposite sex.

Rather, this book is an invitation. The One who knows you better than you know yourself, and who loves you more than you can comprehend, wants to take you on a journey.

This journey is for anyone who is searching for the beauty of true

and lasting love, for romance in its purest form, and who is willing to do whatever it takes to find it. This journey is for anyone who has made mistakes and said, “It’s too late for me to discover *that* kind of love.” It’s a journey for anyone who is tired of the same old scene of physically intense relationships devoid of meaning and purpose.

This journey is for anyone who will dare to dream beyond the cheap and diluted romance our culture offers and hold out for an infinitely better way. This journey is even for the skeptic who doubts that such a way exists.

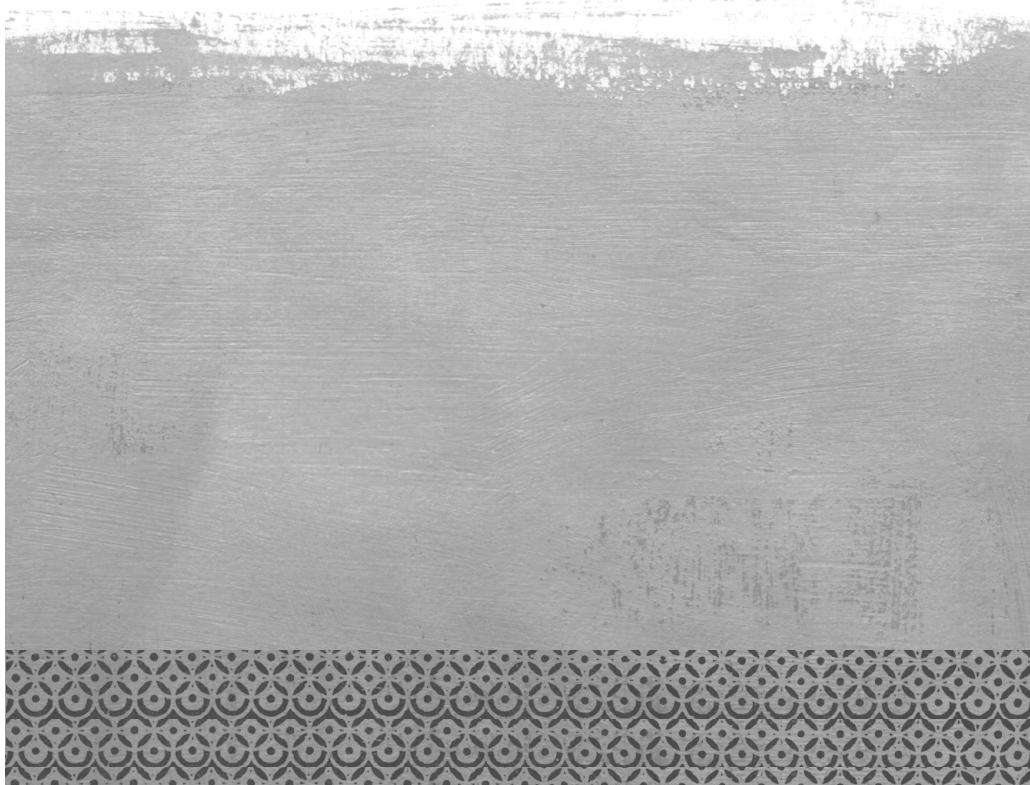
No matter where you are or where you have been, *this invitation is for you*. The Author of all true love and romance stands before you, asking, *Will you let Me write your love story?*

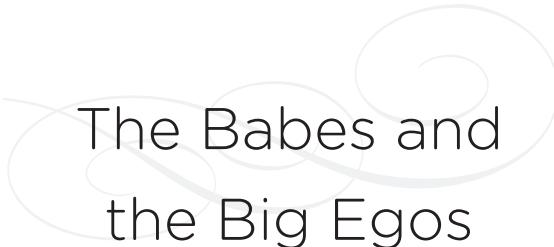
Part One



The Author of Romance

Giving God the Pen





The Babes and the Big Egos

The day I made my choice

✖ ERIC ✖

All the Kens and Barbies sat around the table.¹ Amid glistening smiles and Coppertone tans, the fragrance of Polo with a hint of Skin So Soft (yes, this was the good old nineties!) wafted through the café booth. I nibbled at my burrito as the conversation around me finally arrived at its ultimate destination.

“So, Kevin,” Barbie no. 1 flirted across the table, “tell us who you’re seeing now.”

Kevin, the son of a state senator, was used to having eyes upon him. Being a Tom Cruise look-alike has a way of boosting the ego. As he crunched a chip between perfect teeth, an “I thought you’d never ask” smirk found its way across his face.

As all of us camp counselors leaned in, eyes bulging with

expectancy, Kevin finally revealed the secret in a low monotone: “Her name is...Sandra!”

This only added to the excitement and wonder, because no one had any idea who Sandra was.

“Is she a babe?” crooned the resident Brad Pitt, alias Mike from Wyoming.

Say no more! Swift as the bionic man, Kevin whipped out his wallet. Moments later we all observed a photograph of the “hottest girl on the planet,” as Kevin so proudly referred to her.

“Niiice!” came the rumble of approval from Brad Pitt and Matt Damon (Wayne from Denver).

“I think she has a huge nose!” grumbled one of the girls under her breath.

I continued to pick at my burrito.

Barbie no. 2, sitting beside Top Gun, was next in the heartthrob inquisition. She displayed a photo of her boyfriend to cheers of “You go, girl!” from the Barbies and disapproving rumbles about his skinny neck from the Kens, Brads, Matts, and Toms.

After a week of having to exhibit saintlike behavior to all the little campers and being superspiritual while around the camp leaders, it was time to let our hair down—time to let the real passions of life come out. I mean, in your late teens and early twenties, you can sing only so many spiritual camp songs before you need an infusion of good old-fashioned romance.

One year earlier, talks like this had really lit my fire. I used to love to brag about my love life at camp and exaggerate about *my* “sexy new girlfriend” in a way that would make all the guys jealous and all the

girls insecure. You could say just about anything and get away with it; no one was going home with you to check out your story.

I used to crave these love life chats, but something about Eric Ludy had changed—something big. Something that made me want to slide under the table when all those inquisitive eyes turned my way.

I'll never forget the moment. There I was, my fork poking at the jalapeño stranded on the corner of my plate and my mind screaming over and over, *Please don't ask me...please don't ask me.*

They asked.

"So, Eric, tell us about your exciting love life!"

All the periwinkle, emerald, and dark brown eyes were twinkling at me with expectation. I gulped.

"Uh," I mumbled. My palms were sweaty. My tongue was dry and thick, like I had a felt eraser in my mouth. Finally, I found my voice. "Uh, I uh, actually, uh, I am waiting on God."

But to be honest, it didn't really come out as clearly as I just wrote it. The last part of my sentence was mumbled under my breath, sounding something like, "Ima waying on Gaw."

I hoped a brief answer would encourage them to move on to Elle Macpherson (a.k.a. Kayla from Utah) seated next to me, poised and ready with a photo of her hunk. The plan backfired. They became even more interested.

"Uh, I think we missed that, Ludy," Tom Cruise sarcastically challenged. "Was that a girl's name or some kind of Chinese food?"

After the laughs subsided, I began again, this time a little more clearly.

"I know this may sound strange, you guys, but I've decided that

I won't give my heart to another girl until God shows me it's my wife."

I have often wished I could have been more eloquent, that I could have made my resolve sound a little more appealing to my audience, now staring at me with mouths ajar. But I guess God wanted me to know that I was following a different path, that I was not to seek the approval of the Kens and Barbies of this world but simply to honor and love Him.

It was a lonely moment. Silence filled our corner of the restaurant, and all eyes focused on the jalapeño I was ruthlessly stabbing to death.

"That's...interesting!" Barbie no. 1 awkwardly noted, her eyes large with disbelief.

Wayne from Denver was not quite as subtle in his disapproval. "Oh, give me a break!" he exploded in disgust. "How in the world do you expect to find someone, Ludy, if you're not out there looking?" His words incited a chorus of *yeahs* and *exactlys* from around the booth.

After a moment of reflective silence, I took a deep breath and stated, "I believe that if God wants me to be married"—another deep breath—"He will pick her out for me."

A dark cloud settled over the entire group and rained down bewilderment in the form of pursed lips and rolled eyes. I glanced up from my tortured jalapeño to discover a long bony index finger pointing at me, about twelve inches from my nose. Kevin used that finger like Clint Eastwood used a gun. He didn't shoot to maim—he shot to kill. His bronzed face had turned red with annoyance, and his lips were quivering with indignation, like a lava pool ready to explode. After three long seconds, he finally erupted.

"I totally disagree with you!" he fumed, his index finger still targeting my right nostril. "God doesn't want us hanging around nagging Him about something like *that!*"

A few "amens" from the crowd textured his passionate sermon. He continued. "I believe God wants *us* to pick," he preached, "and then He blesses *our* choice!" He paused and then came to a climactic finish: "It's sappy Christianity like yours that gives us Christians the image of helpless orphans! It is absolutely *ridiculous* to think that God would care that much about *your* love life!"

The finger held fast for another few long seconds, then slowly dropped as if to say, *You show any sign of life, and I'll shoot again!*

I was the ultimate bummer to their titillating conversation. If ever you want to drain the juice right out of romance, just bring God into the picture. I had committed the unpardonable camp counselor sin, and all the eyes around the table were letting me know it.

Growing up, I had always gotten along with everybody. I knew how to be liked by the crowd and not offend anyone. I was careful to say the right thing in order to avoid disagreements. Eric Ludy had never been known for his backbone...well, except maybe in championing the Denver Broncos. But when it came to things that *really* mattered, I was just plain spineless. This was one of the first times in my life I can remember actually standing up for something I believed in (that wasn't orange and blue).

Ironically, I didn't even know exactly what I was talking about. Just twelve months before, I, too, would have "totally disagreed" with what I had just said. But over the past year, God had been challenging me to apply my Christianity to *every* area of my life. Was it ridiculous

to think God would be interested enough in my love life to direct me to the girl He wanted me to spend my life with?

I shifted in my seat, stabbed my jalapeño one last time, and spoke. “All I know,” I said, “is that every time I’ve tried to find someone myself, I realize in the long run that I have horrible taste.”

All eyes were wide with amazement as I concluded, “Kevin, if God had ten women line up in front of me and said, ‘Eric, you pick,’ I would fall flat on my face before Him and say, ‘God, You know me better than I know myself... *You pick!*’”

I’ll bet no one present other than myself remembers that scene. To them it was probably just the ramblings of a lunatic named Ludy. But for me it was a defining moment. It was almost as if God was saying, “How seriously are you going to trust Me, Eric?”

So there it was, in front of the babes and the big egos, that God challenged me to officially trust Him with the pen of my life. I had held onto that pen for twenty years, and now, over a chicken burrito and a mangled jalapeño, I handed it over to the great Author to allow Him to work His wonders.

I’ve never regretted it for a moment.

The Sweeter Song

A generation's longing for a better kind of love

× ERIC ×

Senior year homecoming was a disaster. Some wacko played upon my gullibility and convinced me that in October, Jesus would return and the end of the world would come.

Why I believed this guy, I'll never know. But for some reason I was convinced that within a very short time, I would be caught up in the clouds for all of eternity. Due to the fact that the world was only weeks away from total devastation, I had to put my priorities right in my life.

The homecoming dance was a month away, and a good majority of the girls were still available. *I'm not even going to be around for that*, I reasoned to myself as the weeks ticked away. The problem was, not only did the weeks pass by without Jesus returning, but all the available dates from my school were snatched up by other guys less concerned about the world's impending destruction.

Well, life would just have to continue. The homecoming dance could go on without old dateless Eric...except for one small problem. Much to my shock, I somehow ended up in the homecoming court. Now I *had* to go. And I had to have a date.

I found a girl in a nearby town who was a friend of a friend. She agreed, rather reluctantly, to be my date for the evening. But she made her feelings clear: "The fact that I'm going with you to this party doesn't mean anything beyond going to this party, I hope you know!"

She was a curly-headed brunette, heavy on perfume and light on charm. Of course, I'm sure that my gross insensitivity to her throughout the evening did not draw out her best side. My first mistake was forgetting her at the dance and losing her for about an hour. The second mistake I made sort of sealed my fate for the evening. It was all very innocent. There I was, fumbling around trying to somehow apologize for my complete lack of sensitivity. I mean, I hadn't just forgotten that she was with me that night; I had totally forgotten that she existed until another girl came up and informed me, "Brandy is furious with you!"

I innocently replied, "Who's Brandy?"

So there I was, brainless as a paperweight and red as a beet, trying to convince my date that she was important to me.

"Brandy," I floundered, "you are great! You are special!"

She looked at me and snorted in disgust. Then came my demise. Over the next few minutes, my buddies crowded around, and the conversation began to brighten. A few jokes were made, and all of us were laughing. Well, all except Brandy. My buddy Darren brought up the subject of names, and we were chuckling about how all of us sort of

take on an appearance that fits our names. That was my cue. Brilliant Don Juan that I was, I turned my gaze toward my date and spoke.

“It’s kinda hilarious, but did I tell you...I’ve got an arthritic old cat named Brandy?!”

Her eyes narrowed, and she replied dryly, “Really? Well, I have a pug-nosed dog named Eric!”

That was the last I ever saw of poor Brandy.

The Beautiful Side of Love

Most of us have fallen flat on our faces when it comes to romance. Nearly all of us are familiar with the awful fragrance that accompanies a decomposing relationship.

As Joel, a college friend, said after he had crashed and burned once again on a Saturday night, “Man! I know how to start the relationships; I just don’t know how to keep ’em.”

That, unfortunately, is not a problem isolated to Joel from the third floor of Baker Hall (who, by the way, is still single as of the last romance update). In our generation it is a problem of epidemic proportions.

Then there is Margo from Minnesota. Margo doesn’t feel much sympathy for Joel. As she would say, “I wish I even had the *opportunity* to mess up a relationship with a guy!”

Whether you identify with Joel or with Margo or neither, I guarantee you will identify with the sentiments of Katie, a senior in college who has done a lot of thinking on the subject. “Eric and Leslie, my greatest desire,” Katie told us with great passion, “is that my love story would be beautiful.”

Katie represents the sentiments of an entire love-hungry generation weaned on condoms and AIDS education. We know the biology, but we do not know “the beautiful side of love.”

If we were to be honest, most of us concluded by the age of sixteen that the “beautiful side of love” is something only discovered on an old-fashioned Hollywood movie set by people like Cary Grant and Grace Kelly.

I know the world you live in, because I live in it too. And although I didn’t get a doctoral degree in romance, I believe that Leslie and I have a message that can turn your concept of a love life upside down. If you’re anything like the rest of this love-hungry generation, you are going to discover a little taste of heaven on earth when you read about the “beautiful side of love” that *really does* exist.

If you knew my love life’s history, you might wonder what qualifies me to share this beautiful side of love with you. I often wonder the very same thing. From the beginning, I was quite inept at this relationship thing. I had my gangly, four-eyed, brace-faced season of struggle, when I was termed by all the well-meaning women in my life as “skinny” and in desperate need of one of their “fattening up” meals.

No one can accuse me of not knowing what it feels like to be ugly. I remember getting a free photo shoot from Olan Mills when I was at the height of my ugly years. I think they paid *me* to take the photo off their hands just so it would not end up in their example album by mistake.

I also know what it is like to be lonely. In fact, long after the awkward and ugly years had passed, I experienced the toxic mix of loneliness.

ness and sexual longing that creates the sensation of your heart being toasted like a s'more-destined marshmallow over a roaring campfire.

I know what it is like to want someone to hold, someone to gently lean upon me, someone to care about me more than anyone else on earth. I know what it is like to desire someone with whom I can share my passionate love, my sappy love songs, and my intimate embrace. I know what it is like to long for “the beautiful side of love.”

As I said, homecoming 1988 was a disaster. There was nothing beautiful about it. (I’m still a little insecure when people talk about pug-nosed dogs around me.) But wedding date 1994 was off-the-charts incredible! Somewhere between homecoming and honeymoon, my entire understanding of love changed. And in the process, I discovered what is missing in our modern concept of love and romance. I discovered the beautiful side of love. And I found it in a very unexpected place.

Passion and the Pew

Growing up in the church, I came to believe that everything I longed for was somehow bad for my proper spiritual development. “THOU SHALT NOT!” the pastor would boom from the pulpit as I sat in the rear-numbing pew, daydreaming about sexy Suzie McFrougal from Hank’s Burger Barn. For most of my life, I thought it was *God* who posed the greatest hurdle to experiencing all the thrills of love and romance. And I would have taken great offense if someone tried to convince me that God should have an even bigger role in my love story. All the stern “thou shalt nots” He had so thoughtfully bestowed on me were quite enough, thank you.

For many years I struggled to find the right words to capture my agonizing frustrations. I was a young man fighting a constant inward battle between needing to obey God's "thou shalt nots" and longing to fulfill my passionate sensual desires.

It wasn't until I stumbled upon the following story from Greek legend that I found the perfect picture to describe my years of torment. If you have unsuccessfully tried to mix "the passion" with "the pew," there's a good chance that you will be able to relate to the hidden message in this classic Greek tale (with a Ludy twist).

A Sweet Song Beckons

(Based on Homer's *Odyssey*)

Captain Ulysses cut a powerful figure as he stood on the deck of his great ship. The afternoon sun shimmered off the water as he strode about the vessel with grace and dignity.

"Steady as she goes!" Ulysses boomed, his voice filling the salty air.

After giving the command, the captain turned his gaze to the starboard side where land was just now coming into view. Neither the screeching gulls overhead nor the rhythmic splash of water against the ship's side diverted Ulysses' attention from what lay just ahead. The smell of adventure was in the air; everything was just as Ulysses liked it. Amidst his reverie a voice arrested his attention.

"Captain!"

The noble leader quickly turned to find a worried seaman, eyes filled with trepidation.

"Captain!" he shouted again, his whole face ablaze with horror.

"Calm down!" Ulysses commanded. "Take a deep breath and tell me what's the matter."

The entire crew within earshot had stopped and gathered 'round to hear the outcome of this all-important conversation.

"Uh...we...uh...", he stuttered.

Ulysses grabbed him by the collar, yanked him within inches of his furrowed brow and demanded, "Come on, lad. If you value your life, speak!"

The drama built as the petrified first mate raised a quivering finger due north and blurted out, "The Sirens, sir!"

Ulysses' face drew tight, and a woeful sigh wafted throughout the ship. The Siren mermaids were just ahead, ready to sing their irresistibly enchanting song and cause the bewitched sailors to steer their vessel onto the rocks. The song of the Sirens was so sweet, so alluring, no red-blooded man could resist it. Ulysses had to act quickly—while wisdom still remained.

"Those devils won't get us!" he announced to his fearful crew. "That's right! That intoxicating music won't have its way with us. No shipwreck for us today, lads!"

But even as Ulysses pondered the mesmerizing music, he felt his wisdom slipping. He was gripped by a magnetic urge to hear just a short strain of the Sirens' legendary song.

Maybe we could just steer away from the rocks, he reasoned. Then he chided himself. NO! The Sirens' music does this to all captains who pass by. They all think they can resist, but then lose their senses and follow the sweet music to their deaths upon the jagged rocks, while the monsters scoff from above. NO!

Ulysses ran to the bow of the ship, then turned and bellowed for all the crewmen to hear.

“We are mere men, unable to resist the promise of sweet love in the Sirens’ song. They have baited every ship before us with their songs, and every time the ships have crashed against the rocks upon which the Sirens sit. But not this time, my friends. *We* will not fall to their temptation; indeed, we will not even allow ourselves to be tempted!

“I want every sailor to take some of this beeswax and put it in your ears so you can hear nothing. And tie *me* to the mast!”

His crew looked at each other in bewilderment.

“You heard me!” he shouted again. “Tie me to the mast! And tie me tight and fast!”

The sun angrily beat down as the disciplined crew rushed about the ship responding to Ulysses’ orders. And none too soon, for almost the moment they had crammed the wax into their ears and finished tying their captain to the mast, the beautiful and entralling love song of the Siren began to softly fill the air. The Sirens’ song, in all its passion and wonder, greeted the ship across the water as a warm fire greets cold hands on a winter’s day.

The crew was oblivious—all except Ulysses who, while tied to the mast, had no wax to stop the music. Ulysses’ blood ran hot with passion. “Untie me!” he screamed in anguish. “Please untie me! I command you to untie me...please, I beg you.”

But the crewmen could not hear and had been commanded not to read his lips. The song grew louder and lovelier, and Ulysses began to scream like a madman for someone to heed his orders and turn the ship toward the source of that sweet, lustful music. Ulysses threatened

the plank, Cyclops feedings, and various other forms of torture as the ship passed the Sirens' rocky coastline, and then finally beyond the reach of their song.

An exhausted Ulysses, his face a deep scarlet from the struggle, finally was untied and fell exhausted upon the ship's deck.

"Why?" he moaned with his remaining strength. "Why does it seem that the things I desire most in this life lead to my destruction? Why must I be restrained from something so beautiful? The mast is my savior this day from my headlong craving for that sweet but deadly song of the Siren!"¹

Rope Burned?

I feel Ulysses' pain! I grew up being taught how to "tie myself to the mast" while listening to the song of temptation at full volume. I heard all the fire and brimstone sermons on "the rocks of death." I had all the manuals on enduring rope burn, and I even read one called *How to Chart Your Course So You Never Hear or See a Siren*.

I also lost my senses a few times during my horribly extended pubescent years. I was sort of a Houdini, the way I could slip out of the rope and escape from that mast without any of the Coast Guard finding out. I was a magician when it came to discovering loopholes in the ropes, and I became a seasoned professional at the fine art of incurring serious boat damage.

Like most guys, I grew up in the boys' locker room. The singular topic of conversation that cluttered the airwaves made it a very educational place. I learned far more about my sexuality in two minutes

standing next to Donny Lucero's locker than I did in two hours of scientific lecturing from my dad the night he took me for a drive in our banana-yellow VW Bus and gave me "the Talk."

Desire raged within me to have a female companion, someone I could love and be loved by, someone I could be intimate with. The difference between Donny Lucero's advice and the advice I received from my church on the subject was shocking. Ten bucks says you could guess whose advice I preferred.

I wanted to experience all that Donny described. I wanted to understand it, and not just in theory. The problem was, when I came into church and sat down in the pew, I always heard the same thing: *thou shalt not!* And "thou shalt nots" only go so far with a hormone-infested young man who's looking for loopholes in the rope so he can escape and accidentally-on-purpose steer his love boat as close to the rocks as he can possibly get.

The only reason I maintained a semblance of Christian morality when it came to my sex life was because I thought that God would be furious with me if I did not. As much as I wanted to taste all the pleasures of the world, I didn't relish the idea of going to hell. I obeyed the Christian rules because I had to, not because I wanted to. Meanwhile, I felt utterly deprived, dissatisfied, and miserable. Just like Ulysses, I was tied to the mast, listening to the alluring song of the culture and resenting every inch of the ridiculous rope of morality that held me back from following in Donny's footsteps.

My experience echoes the sentiments of an entire generation of young Christians. Church has taught us well. We know we aren't supposed to have sex with whoever we want, whenever we want. We know that God disapproves of the Sirens' song. So we seem to be left with

only two choices: Either we grudgingly obey the Christian rules and remain tied to the mast—and nearly go crazy wishing we could experience sex the way everyone else does. Or we give up altogether and crash against the rocks of sexual compromise—and end up feeling guilty and distant from God.

Well, I'm happy to let you know that there *is* a third alternative. You don't have to stay tied to the mast, and you don't have to crash your ship on the rocks. Let me tell you another Greek story—this one a bit more inspiring.

The Sweeter Song

Not far behind Ulysses and his men came another great ship. These sailors also realized the dangers of the Sirens and the rocks upon which they sat.

"Captain Orpheus," the first mate declared, "the sweet song of the Sirens lies just ahead!"

With that announcement, the crew cheered and the great Orpheus smiled. All around the ship, crewmen's voices rang with excitement. The part of the voyage that they longed for was close at hand. In fact, some on the ship had come along *just* to hear the music.

With a knowing smile, the dauntless captain received a beautifully adorned case from his cabin boy. The acclaimed Orpheus carefully removed the priceless instrument as the crewmen stood nearby with bated breath. Then, with princely grace, he lifted the instrument above his head in a gesture of victory, while the crew around him whistled with enthusiasm.

"Play it, Captain!" cheered the helmsman.

All eyes were riveted to their hero. Captain Orpheus took his stance and began to masterfully play the most perfect music men's ears had ever heard. Each crewman became lost in the reverie of the song.

All too soon the Siren coastline was out of sight and the master musician concluded the song that he himself had composed. Not a single man aboard ship was tempted by the Sirens' melody. In fact, no one even noticed it. Though the Sirens' music was alluring and sweet, the superb Orpheus played for his crew...*a sweeter song*.²

A Different Tune

For those of us who have spent years tied to the mast, and for those of us who couldn't bear the allurement and crashed against the rocks, it's time to set sail to a different tune.

In our love-hungry generation we struggle to believe that the "beautiful side of love" really exists. But the truth is, Hollywood can't even touch the version of love that is alive and real in the heart and mind of God. It is the "sweeter song." And when you hear this sweeter song, you, too, will realize that it is ten thousand times more magnificent than your grandest imaginings.

God created us with a desire for companionship. He designed us to intensely long for intimacy—spiritual, emotional, and yes, even physical. He did not make us this way and provide us with these longings as a form of cruel torture, but as the most perfect gift He could possibly give us. Just as a lover desires to show his adoration by tenderly presenting his bride with a delicate and fragrant rose, so has our Great Lover gifted us with this delicate and wondrous capacity to give and receive love and passion. And once we awaken to this truth, then we

will discover that, as the Inventor of romance, He also wants to teach us how to experience it in all its fullness.

If you dream of something eternally sweet and are tired of rope burn, God is eagerly waiting for you to jump aboard His ship so He can play the sweeter song just for you.

As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.

PSALM 18:30

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:...Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things.

PSALM 103:2, 4-5

A Look Inside Your Heart

1. How would you describe “the beautiful side of love”? Where, if anywhere, have you seen a glimpse of this kind of love?
2. When it comes to your love life, do you think God is more interested in “thou shalt nots” or in helping you hear the “sweeter song”?

3. In what ways do you think God's love song differs from the world's? Which version is more appealing to you, and why?
4. Are you willing to allow God's Spirit to reshape your attitude toward love and romance? In what ways, specifically, does your perspective need to change?

A Step Further

Take some time to meditate upon some of the glorious promises of God found in Psalm 34, Psalm 37, Psalm 84, and Psalm 103. As you do, keep in mind that these promises aren't merely poetic-sounding words, but they actually capture God's very heart toward you. We serve a God who genuinely *delights* in giving good and perfect gifts to His children. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:16). Do you really believe and expect that in your own life? If you struggle with doubt, ask His Spirit to equip you with real faith to believe that God is exactly who He says He is and cares about you as much as He says He does. Write down anything you feel He is speaking to your heart. ☀